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2020 Neustadt International Prize for Literature

Lesson plans for grades 9-12 to study the work of the 2020 Neustadt Laureate Ismail Kadare

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About the Neustadt International Prize for Literature:
The Neustadt International Prize for Literature is a biennial award sponsored by the University of Oklahoma and *World Literature Today*. The prize was established in 1969 as the Books Abroad International Prize for Literature, then renamed the Books Abroad/Neustadt Prize before assuming its present name in 1976, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature. It is the first international literary award of this scope to originate in the United States and is one of the very few international prizes for which poets, novelists, and playwrights are equally eligible. Biennially, an international jury of outstanding writers is selected and convened to decide the winners. The members of the jury are determined by the executive director of *World Literature Today* in consultation with the journal’s editors and the president of the University of Oklahoma. Each juror nominates one author for the prize. The jurors convene at the University of Oklahoma for their deliberations.

The charter of the Neustadt Prize stipulates that the award be given in recognition of outstanding achievement in poetry, fiction, or drama and that it be conferred solely on the basis of literary merit. Any living author writing in any language is eligible, provided only that at least a representative portion of his or her work is available in English, the language used during the jury deliberations. The prize may serve to crown a lifetime’s achievement or to direct attention to an important body of work that is still developing. (The prize is not open to application.)

The Neustadt Scholar Program at Colorado Academy:
Colorado Academy hosts an annual writing competition for Upper School students, whereby winners are selected through a process of positive elimination, modeled after the Jury deliberation process for the Neustadt prizes. Members of the English and History Departments collaborate to select two to four CA Neustadt Scholars based on submissions modeled on and/or connected to the work of the Neustadt/NSK laureate for that year. The CA Neustadt Scholars attend the Neustadt/NSK Festival at the University of Oklahoma, their work is published in various journals by Colorado Academy and *World Literature Today*, and they participate in workshops with the winning authors and/or jurors.
About Ismail Kadare

Albanian novelist, poet, essayist, and playwright Ismail Kadare (b. 1936) has written a large body of work. Born in 1936 in the Albanian mountain town of Gjirokaster near the Greek border, he is Albania's best-known poet and novelist. Kadare rose to fame on the strength of his poetry and published his first novel, *The General of the Dead Army*, in 1963. He has won many international awards and is regarded by some as one of the greatest contemporary European writers, often cited as a contender for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Kadare is a champion of international democracy and in 1990 went into political asylum in France. He has written, “I became familiar with literature before I knew freedom, so that it was literature that led me to liberty, not the other way around. Faith in literature and in the creative process brings protection. It generates antibodies that allow you to struggle against state terror.”

Acclaimed worldwide as one of the most important writers of our time, in 2005 he was named the winner of the first ever Man Booker International Prize. Living in France in asylum since 1990, some of Kadare's stories and poems had to be smuggled out of the country by his French publisher, Claude Durand, and stored in safekeeping; others, like "The Blinding Order," clearly could not be published in their own time. Translations of Kadare's novels have been published in more than forty countries, and his work has been reviewed in the pages of *Books Abroad* and *World Literature Today* since 1972.

“Kadare is the successor of Franz Kafka. No one since Kafka has delved into the infernal mechanism of totalitarian power and its impact on the human soul in as much hypnotic depth as Kadare. Having lived in just such a surveillance state for the first decades of his life – he was born in Albania, a hermetically sealed communist state until 1991 where, under dictator Enver Hoxha, labor camp sentences and executions of dissenters were routine – writing was the only form of resistance available to him, because it was the only form of truth-telling that could survive – though not always in print. He emigrated to France in the 1990s, when the country’s borders opened.” – Kapka Kassabova, Kadare’s nominating juror

A note about the lessons in this resource packet

There are five lessons in this resource packet that draw on or connect to the writing of Ismail Kadare. The culture, wars, history, and struggles in Albania are vague to many students in the US, because our curriculum lacks depth on this content. Therefore, it can be true for some readers that the nuance in much of his work is hard to decipher. What is extremely clear and easy for readers in grades 9-12 to grasp is Kadare’s boundless curiosity, ceaseless imagination, and the optimism and faith he has in his reader. It is clear that he hopes to inspire this in those who grapple with his prose. Each of the following lessons has an excerpt of Kadare’s work accompanied by another resource and a writing assignment (or exercise). In most cases the writing assignments can be switched or interchanged, so as you read these, consider shifting things around to fit your style and the needs of your students. Most of all, I hope you will enjoy the investigation of Ismail Kadare and the student work that he inspires.

- T. Thorpe, June 2020
All lessons are aligned to meet the following Oklahoma Standards for English Language Arts, grades 9-12

- **Standard 1: Speaking and Listening** - Students will speak and listen effectively in a variety of situations including, but not limited to, responses to reading and writing. **Reading** - Students will develop and apply effective communication skills through speaking and active listening. **Writing** - Students will develop and apply effective communication skills through speaking and active listening to create individual and group projects and presentations.

- **Standard 3: Critical Reading and Writing** - Students will apply critical thinking skills to reading and writing. **Reading** - Students will comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and respond to a variety of complex texts of all literary and informational genres from a variety of historical, cultural, ethnic, and global perspectives. **Writing** - Students will write for varied purposes and audiences in all modes, using fully developed ideas, strong organization, well-chosen words, fluent sentences, and appropriate voice.

- **Standard 4: Vocabulary** - Students will expand their working vocabularies to effectively communicate and understand texts. **Reading** - Students will expand academic, domain-appropriate, grade-level vocabularies through reading, word study, and class discussion. **Writing** - Students will apply knowledge of vocabularies to communicate by using descriptive, academic, and domain-appropriate abstract and concrete words in their writing.

- **Standard 5: Language** - Students will apply knowledge of grammar and rhetorical style to writing. **Writing** - Students will demonstrate command of Standard English grammar, mechanics, and usage through writing and other modes of communication.

- **Standard 7: Multimodal Literacies** - Students will acquire, refine, and share knowledge through a variety of written, oral, visual, digital, non-verbal, and interactive texts. **Writing** - Students will create multimodal texts to communicate knowledge and develop arguments.

- **Standard 8: Independent Reading and Writing** - Students will write independently for extended periods of time. **Writing** - Students will vary their modes of expression to suit audience and task.
A note about “The Blinding Order,” by David Bellos

"The Blinding Order," written in 1984, was first published as "Qorrfirmani" in the journal Zen i Rinise and subsequently published in La Grande muraille, suivi de Le Firman aveugle (1993), translated into French by Jusuf Vrioni. Set in the Tanzimat or "reform" period of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, the story's narrator speculates on the uses of terror in a context that is only superficially remote from that of modern authoritarian regimes. Mark-Alem, the central character of The Palace of Dreams, one of Kadare's best-known novels, makes a fleeting appearance; the main protagonists belong to a branch of the Köprülü clan, whose long history is chronicled throughout Kadare's work. The literal translation of qorrfirman is "blind decree." This excerpt concludes the story.

The Blinding Order
By Ismail Kadare
(translated by David Bellos)

IN EARLY WINTER, the sightless suddenly began congregating on sidewalks and in cafes. Their fumbling steps caused passers-by to stop and stare in disbelief. Although citizens had lived for months in fear of the qorrfirman, the sight of its results rooted them to the ground, petrified them.

For some time people had allowed themselves to think that the victims of that notorious order had been swallowed up in the dark night of oblivion, that the only people you would come across in the street or the square were the formerly blind, with their unchanging appearance, the peaceful tap-tap-tap of their sticks--the kind of blind people everyone's eyes and ears were long accustomed to. But now the first winter freeze had brought with it innumerable blind folk of a new and far more lugubrious kind.

There was something specific about them that distinguished them from the traditionally unsighted. They had a disturbing swagger, and their sticks made a menacing knock-knock-knock on the cobblestones.

They've not yet grown used to their new condition, some argued. Blindness came to them at a stroke, not gradually, as is usually the case, so they haven't yet acquired the necessary reflexes.... But those who heard such remarks shook their heads, clearly not convinced. Could that be the only reason?

What was most striking was their collective reappearance. It was probably not a coincidence, nor could it have been the result of secret collusion among them, contrary to the rumors that were being circulated by people who saw anti-state conspiracies in everything and anything. It came from the simple fact that the time needed for most of them to recover--either from the physical wounds caused by disoculation or from its attendant psychological trauma--had now elapsed.

Some among them, particularly those who had been blinded in the aristocratic manner, by exposure to the sun, bore a grave and dignified air as they went and sat down in cafes and tearooms. It was presumably easier for them to behave with hauteur, not just because of the cash bonus and the generous pension they had been granted but because their eyes had not been physically mutilated when they were blinded. On the other hand, most of the others had let themselves go. They were dressed in rags, and by way of footwear all they had were wooden clogs, which made the sound of their approach particularly distressing.
But those who had been unsighted by violent means were not the only ones to look wretched. Even some who had turned themselves in to the gorroffices and been received with all due honor were now shuffling around in tatters. Similarly, there were a number of well-dressed people--better dressed than they had been before--among those who had been disoculated violently. They stood defiantly in full sight of all, as if to challenge the world with their black and empty sockets.

At the sight of these gaping wounds, some people were so disturbed that they themselves began to stumble, as if the ground had suddenly opened up beneath them.

"Why do they have to show themselves like that?" people wondered. Why aren't they forbidden access to main roads, to stop them from curdling our blood with those ghastly holes in their heads?

The blind paid not the slightest heed to remarks of that kind. Not content to stay at tearoom and cafe tables for hours on end, they listened to the news read out from the papers at nearby tables and joined in the conversation. Fortunately, public affairs were taking a better turn nowadays, they would say, proving that their sacrifice had not been in vain. "What a pity we can't see what's going on!" some of them lamented over and over again. "But that doesn't really matter in the end. Even if we can't see, we can imagine what it's like, and we're just as pleased about it as you are."

Some of them remained silent, black as crows, while others, taking up the tradition of the blind, got hold of a musical instrument and accompanied themselves as they sang epic rhymes or love songs of their own composition.

The tide of the blind didn't stop rising, at the same rate as hostile gossip about them. Rumor had it that a forthcoming decree would resettle most of them in some remote province of the country (the empire wasn't short of impoverished regions of that kind!) so that foreigners, at least, would never set eyes upon them.

Far from giving any substance to such rumors, on the last Friday in December--on the very day when a special order was announced granting a full pardon to people blinded by violent means--the state held a Banquet of Forgiveness (a sadaka, as it was expressed in the language of the land) for the benefit of all the victims of the Blinding Order.

This "Reconciliation Banquet," as it was subsequently dubbed by malicious tongues, was held in the Imperial Manege, which was the only building large enough for the number of tables required for the many thousands of guests.

The blind flocked toward the manege from all quarters of the capital in an unending clatter of clogs and sticks, and in such confusion that the police were obliged to close the entire area to traffic for several hours.

Dozens of functionaries were there to welcome them and lead them to their places, but all the same, when the blind finally entered the Great Hall and especially when they tried to get to their designated tables, things degenerated into a veritable riot. They knocked over chairs, they did not know where to put the Balkan lyres and lahutas which they had brought with them, God knows why, most of them groped clumsily at their dinner plates and spilled food on themselves, or else tipped the plates right over.
Among this crowd of the blind, someone noticed a clog-wearing, raggedy man elbowing his way toward a table, who was none other than the former grand vizier.

At a long table sat the high officials of the court, together with members of the government and of the entourage of Sheikh ul-Islam. Journalists and foreign diplomats had also been invited.

One of the officials tried to make a speech, but as most of the blind had begun to stuff themselves with food, most of his words were drowned by the scraping of cutlery and the clatter of crockery. Nonetheless, the essential sentences about the need for sacrifice in service of the common good, and especially the message from the sultan encouraging everyone to forget the past and remain loyal to the state, were relatively well understood.

With gravy dripping from their chins, and in high spirits induced by such good food—especially the nut halvah—many of the blind started strumming on their lahutas.

The officials, journalists, and diplomats looked on in silence as the disorderly feast unfolded before their eyes.

"Every cloud has a silver lining.... I think you must have a similar saying in your language too," the Austrian consul eventually said to his colleague from France.

"Yes, of course," the Frenchman replied.

"In spite of its ghastly and untranslatable name, and even in spite of the notorious horror it has caused, the Blinding Order has contributed to a new flowering of oral poetry, which, as I myself noticed, has been in sharp decline in this country in recent years."

"Do you really think so?" the Frenchman replied, looking at his colleague in astonishment. Then he recalled that his colleague had once told him he was engaged in research on oral poetry, which made his remark seem less cynical than bizarre.

"Just look at this crowd, if you want to see the evidence," the Austrian added.

"I guess so," the French consul muttered, as he gazed into the Great Hall where the cacophony of the blind was rising to its peak.

Tirana

Translation from the French

David Bellos, Professor of French and Comparative Literature at Princeton University, has translated five of Ismail Kadare's novels, including The File on H, Spring Flowers, Spring Frost, and The Pyramid. His most recent translation of Kadare, The Successor, appeared in 2005, and Agamemnon's Daughter was published in 2006. In 2005 he received the first Translator's Prize of 55,000 pounds sterling awarded as part of the Man Booker International Prize.
Lesson #1 - Ismail Kadare, “The Blinding Order”
Knocked Off Center Writing Assignment
Estimated time: 2, 50-minute class periods; grades 9-12.

According to Dr. Kwame Anthony Appiah, cosmopolitanism is an attitude that mediates the crises of engagement. Cosmopolitanism, as defined in ancient philosophy, dictates that we approach cultural differences with curiosity rather than judgment, and that could be identified as one of the goals that Ismail Kadare has for his reader. Educational philosopher Maxine Greene wrote that the arts, broadly understood, have the power to “defamiliarize experience,” to get us to see with “fresh eyes,” to knock us off center, so that we can come to greater “wide awakeness.” In this way, Greene believes that the arts respond to Dr. Appiah’s theory of cosmopolitanism. They have the power to move us, open doors, and lead to greater insight into our experience.

To what extent is Ismail Kadare knocking the reader off-center in “The Blinding Order”?

For this writing assignment, choose a work of art -- it can be a painting, a song, a poem, a film, novel, dance, etc. -- that knocks you off center and defamiliarizes experience; this choice is open-ended and nonspecific to encourage you to explore how your experience has been disoriented from its normal context.

Step #1 - Share your piece of art with an audience. It is expected that you will bring the piece, in some form, to class; however, if this is not possible please talk with the teacher. To help identify a piece of art, take a few minutes to search your experiences, your home, or ask someone you know well about art that you have enjoyed. You can also do a simple Google search to identify a piece of art. For this assignment, it is best to avoid choosing a random piece of art; rather, find something that you know well and has meaning for you. In the presentation, you will share your piece of art with the class, explain why you chose it as an example of something that “knocks you off center”, and field any questions from your classmates.

Step #2 - analyze your piece and connect it to “The Blinding Order” - The assignment is to write an analysis of the piece of art explaining why it knocks you off center. Be as specific as you can, and avoid just writing a list. You may choose to include a brief description and background information. Then, compare or contrast it to “The Blinding Order”.

Model:

Francisco de Goya Y Lucentes, 1764 – 1828, “Saturn Devouring One of His Children”
by Tom Thorpe

This painting has always forced a painful reaction from me as I recall the Greek myth of Cronus (Saturn) eating his children to avoid being overthrown. That a father – or any person - can feel so threatened that he must take away the life of others in order to feel secure is too commonly a reality. This painting forces me to consider the forms in which this human emotion manifests itself in the world today: prejudice, racism, war, murder, and genocide are a few examples. Clearly, Goya felt similar pain about the realization that human lives are not valued equally, and he chose to use his “bully pulpit” and talents to do something about it. The questions and thoughts inspired by Goya’s work knocks me off center.

Similarly, in “The Blinding Order” by Ismail Kadare, he forces the reader to understand blindness as an affliction that affects humans in different ways. When those with sight are “… so disturbed that they themselves began to stumble, as if the ground had suddenly opened up beneath them,” Kadare knocks the reader off center by creating a world in which people are violently and apparently haphazardly “disoculated”. In other words, there is no equity in who becomes part of the order and who does not. Those with sight, or not part of the order, are forced to live amongst those with “ghastly holes in their heads”. The reader is forced to consider the randomness of ability, power, privilege, and the systems that are created to keep those “with sight” in power and how to attempt reconciliation for those who “lose their sight.” The stark juxtaposition of Saturn’s crazed eyes in Goya’s painting with the empty eye sockets of Kadare’s order fumbling their way in to the “Banquet of Reconciliation” adds to the feeling of being knocked off center and begs the question, what if Saturn saw his child as a gift as opposed to a threat, and what if those with sight in “The Blinding Order” wished they were disoculated?
The Stranger Next Door
An Anthology from the Other Europe

Edited by
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2004/2013
History of the Other

Ismail Kadare

1

There is a lot of talk about the Other nowadays. And, as so often happens when old themes and conversations are rehashed after a phase of oblivion, we tend to believe that it—the Other one—is the object of our attention for the first time.

In actual fact, all of the fuss and focus on the Other likely goes way back. It is no doubt just as old as human sexuality, fear, and death. The history of the Other probably began one day when a caveman returned horror-struck to his companions, reporting that he had seen something awful, something amazing, something that left him speechless. His fellow cavemen burst out: "What was it? Qu'est-ce que c'était ça? Shto eto bylo? Was war es? Çështe ajo? Who's there? Stand, and reveal yourself!"

Primitive man was not particularly good at articulating his experiences in words. He had not seen a bolt of lightning, a wild beast, or a volcano, but something worse: a being that was like him, but was not him, with a body that was similar to his and of the same origin. But instead of attracting him, it became something that he profoundly feared, abhorred, and rejected.

For the first time, caveman found himself face to face with the Other. The interrogations continued in the cavern. Explanations were demanded, questions asked, replies awaited. "Show yourself! Halte et explique toi! Stoy i obyavis! Steh und gib dich kund! Qëndro e shfaq. Stand, and reveal yourself!"

2

That episode goes so far back into history that we ought best mirror it with the following incident that took place one evening on June 22, 1602.

It was a premiere at the Globe Theatre in London, and the audience teemed to see the tale of a certain Hamlet who was about to slay his father
in revenge. Not entirely new material, it must be said. It had already been performed on stage two or three times. The house was full, and indeed all of London was ablaze with rumors and gossip, just as it was every time performances like these were given. 'Another of those tedious stories! Same old stuff. No, quite the contrary! This one is different. It's a masterpiece. It takes place at the Royal Court of Denmark. The author has changed all the names to avoid any diplomatic repercussions. I've heard that it begins with a ghost. Really? I love ghosts. No, I can't stand them, and my wife will be hysterical. She is very high-strung, you know.'

The audience could barely wait for the performance to begin. And so it did, and was just as had been rumored. It was a foggy night out on the walls of the fortress of the King of Denmark. A silent watchman was on duty. Someone approaches in the mist, and the famous exchange takes place between the soldiers:

"Who's there? Nay, answer me: Stand, and reveal yourself!"

Much has been said and written about the opening scene of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Many scholars believe that the tense atmosphere and the harsh tone of the suspicious guards were designed to underline the fear that had spread through Denmark with the appearance of the king's ghost. Other experts have been surprised that such a masterpiece of world theater should have such a banal beginning—a simple exchange between sentinels. T. S. Eliot held that this was done on purpose. The grave tone of the line was to prepare the audience for the appearance of the ghost.

The exchange between the two sentinels is not unlike the one that took place two million years ago at the entrance to the cavern. The ghost about to enter the scene is essentially the same one that we love to discuss today: the Other. And his appearance is indeed "otherly." Nothing on earth could be more otherly and unnerving for human beings than the ghost of a dead man. Its skin, its hair, its eyes, the length of its arms and legs, its movements, its voice, its silence—everything is different. But this is only the start. It goes much deeper than this, from outward appearance to the very core of its being. The ghost is otherly because of its dual nature; it is both dead and alive at the same time. But it is different in many other ways, too. For example: in the knowledge it possesses, in its view of the world, in the enigmas it unravels, in the messages it conveys. In short, it is otherly in every sense of the word. It knows what we do not know, it sees what we do not see. It appears in the real world but looks unreal to many, or it appears in an unreal world that looks real.

At any rate, it looks dangerous, both when it seemingly comes to our assistance and when it looms with threats and wrath. The ghost of Hamlet's father on the parapets of the castle of Elsinor seems to appear in order to demand justice, to compensate for crimes committed. But in the final analysis, all that remains is a tally of murders and a pile of bodies.

Are we to believe it? This is Hamlet's big question, and ours, too. Thus we witness the call of one of the sentinels: "Stand, and reveal yourself!" It is our desperate appeal, our fear at the very start of the drama. "Do not hide from us any longer, reveal yourself!"

People are not indifferent to the ghost of the Other, and never have been. They may be petrified at seeing a snake or a tiger or when experiencing an earthquake, but never when confronted with their own image. Sirens sound when rivers overflow their banks or when wild animals are on the loose, but this is nothing compared to the real alarm expressed for something bearing man's image. People are better armed and prepared for this type of encounter than for anything else. They made themselves ready with long tales, books, music, symbols, walls, gates, and, more than anything else, weapons. Armies were deployed at borders; spies crept deep into enemy territory; sentinels held watch in lofty towers, ready to cry out: "Stand, and reveal yourself!"

When being instructed in the history of their country, schoolchildren have to learn all sorts of things: the dates of important events and the names of famous heroes as well as fair but faithless damsels. They learn and learn until, in the end, they discover that the spice of the dough in which this history is kneaded is the Other. Without it, the songs of their heroes would be boring, their victories shallow, and their celebrations meaningless. In brief: were it not for him, our lives would be pale, bungled, and senseless.

Wretched columns of prisoners of war marching, heads bowed, past their victors; the flags and banners of the foe seized with the soldiers and taken as trophies; vanquished commanders and kings shuffling by in shackles—all of these are unforgettable images of victory in battle.

The annals of history have recorded one curious war—that between the Hittites and the Hurrites. The main problem was not fighting the enemy, but finding him in the desert. The Hittite army set out, but of its return—if there was one—we know nothing. Nor do we know what occurred in that desert—who won and who lost. What was particularly disturbing at the time was that the Other was not to be found. He simply vanished in the desert, in contradiction to the laws of nature. They at least wanted to see their foe, to touch him, and have a go at him.
To avoid the Hittite-Hurrite problem—or let us say, the sheer disappointment—the Communist countries took pains to make the Other known and evident in their propaganda, films, and plays. They organized witch hunts and trials with living foes so that the Other would be present and visible in flesh and blood. Reveal yourself!

To stage the unmasking of the Other as effectively as possible, everyone had to await their downfall with great anticipation. In Communist terminology, this was called “holding high the revolutionary spirit”—in effect, fomenting unflagging hatred, fanning the flames to annihilate the Other.

To achieve this, the image of the Other was never allowed to be forgotten or questioned.

In other words, the Other—the source of all conflict and war—was ubiquitous. It was in our skin, in our language (barbarian, as the Greeks would say), in our religion, and in our ideas, doctrines, and civilization. The virus of its discord penetrated where one would least expect it—into our own families and political clans, tarnishing and destroying blood ties. It even managed to achieve the impossible: to infect the love between two human beings. This was perhaps its greatest victory.

4

There is something tragic, something fatal in this state of things. To put it simply, can there be an answer to the question: “Why such hatred, why so many wars, why does everything else lead to exhaustion and subside except for it?” The question may seem rather naïve.

We believe that, with the passing of the centuries, humankind has acquired a certain degree of wisdom. And one could have hoped, now that the evil has been recognized, that it would look back at the foibles of the past with contempt and venture forth to a better future. But exactly the opposite has taken place before our very eyes. We see that humankind has stooped to such a level of folly that, as Karl Popper would say, it reminds us of two parties brandishing thousands and thousands of atomic weapons in their hands. Popper described them as two duelists who have come, armed not with a pistol to shoot the Other, but with five thousand pistols.

In view of the current state of things that has not changed at all as I write these lines, we have no right to regard such a question as naïve.

But let us continue. Could all of this have been avoided? Where was the mistake? Is there hope that something could change?

War has been interpreted as the continuation of politics by other means, and politics is said to be a continuation of economics, and so on. Then there was the discourse on the dark side of human nature. Our world, with everything that takes place in it, is being observed through the lenses of billions and billions of cameras—that is, through the eyes and in the minds of billions of human beings. In other words, every human being has a geography and history of his own—a routine that he observes day and night, every minute and every hour. And these billions of individual visions, these billions of essences of the Other, offer a potential for catastrophe on a cosmic scale.

We must be careful with thought patterns that go beyond the capacities that nature has bestowed on our brains. We must return to a clearer vision of things dictated to us by our own human condition—that is, by our limitations. In this situation, we cannot avoid the simple question: “Is there hope that something could change?”

Of course there is. However nebulous the ghost on the parapets of Hamlet’s castle was, those who saw it or imagined they saw it—the sentinels, the companions of the prince, even Prince Hamlet himself—dared to cry out: “Stand, and reveal yourself!”

This should be the focus of our discussions here at this forum on the Other. But let us return safely to the annals of history, where things perhaps took their start.

In the beginning, the records of history were ocular, if one may say so. It was the eye that was startled or frightened by the appearance of the Other, firstly by the color of his skin and then by everything else. The human eye is closely linked to the ear. It was the language of the Other that disturbed the ancient Greeks. They had no hesitation in calling it barbaric, and barbaric were the people who spoke it. Then that most eminent and, at the same time, most dangerous part of the human body, took over: the brain. It was disturbed not only by the skin and language of the Other, but by things that could not be seen by eyes or heard by ears—but by the tales within it, its myths, beliefs, customs, memories, and fears. It was not only race and language that defined the Other. It was something more, something equally dramatic, something that escalated and attained the tragic. Whole nations were set on collision courses. Their customs and doctrines clashed, as did finally their civilizations.

What began with eyes and ears went much further than one would have expected.

5

It cannot be said that humankind was indifferent to the danger. In one way or another, if not directly then indirectly, it strove to find antidotes. The
search for criteria to define the Other was an attempt to hold back evil. Beyond appearance and language, which made the Other easily recognizable in a primitive sort of way, people began searching for something more profound, something deeper in the body. And many nations, independent of one another, began to concentrate their attention on blood. It is not particularly clear why the distinction was made in something that, in itself, shows no distinction—something that is in fact quite the opposite. To look for a distinguishing feature where it is masterfully concealed could be regarded as a probe into evil or, possibly, as a questioning of the very evil intent within.

Blood has always fascinated human beings. As a result, much symbolic, mythical, and often fatal significance has been attached to it. The earliest interpretations of it can be seen in the first primitive models, full of fantasy, of future genetics. It was a twist of fate that made the ancient Greeks, for example, understand that blood that had left the human body could never return to it (quite true until the invention of transfusions). Their inability to get blood back into the body was interpreted symbolically as the irreversibility of fate in general.

Another such twist was what were called blood ties, which, according to our ancestors, explained affection among members of a family, a tribe, or a whole clan. It was no great leap from here to the concept of the purity or impurity of blood and all the repercussions this concept spurred, and then to the “taking of blood.” Herein, too, lies the origin of repentance and the guilty conscience, emotions dealt with so masterfully in Greek tragedy.

Treating blood as an element of identification, as a sort of identity card for a tribe, clan, or whole nation, had two tragic consequences: firstly, crimes committed in the name of purity of blood, and secondly, crimes committed in vendetta, or blood feuding. We encounter both consequences in Homeric verse and even more evidently in Greek theater. But in the following centuries, the Greeks would be surpassed by far, and in the Holocaust carried out against European Jews in the mid-twentieth century, matters would reach their zenith.

6

The chronicle of the Other was to need, and, it seems, will always need new sustenance. The fear of the ancient Hittites not to be able to find the Hurrites has been repeated over and over in the chronicles of history. It is a fact that if the Other did not exist, he would have to found, have to be invented.
At that time, in particular after the death of Stalin, a certain consensus was reached to explain away the tragedies that had taken place. The formula that was used was designed to appease and placate. It was more of a justification than anything. Stalin was made the guilty party. In other words, communism was in essence just and fair, but had been degraded and ruined. Stalin was the one with blood on his hands, and Lenin remained on his pedestal.

No one was actually relieved by this explanation, in particular when the full truth was revealed and it was discovered that Stalin had merely been acting on orders from Lenin. The latter was the root of the evil, for he had been as brutal as his successor and perhaps more ruthless.

The formula was altered. Now both were the bad guys, and Trotsky, too, whom they had purged and eliminated. With them in the boat were their successors, big and small: Mao Zedong, Nicolae Ceausescu, Walter Ulbricht, Enver Hoxha, and Fidel Castro, among others. Marx however was left untouched, a consolation.

If we were to paraphrase the first sentence of the Communist Manifesto, we might say that a question is haunting Europe. Will the guilt ever reach Marx himself? Composure, impartiality, and levelheadedness are required for an answer. As proponents of the world of letters, we writers, more than others, may be permitted the freedom to search for literary analogies, especially in view of the fact that, at the start of his Communist Manifesto, Marx seems to allude to Shakespeare’s ghost. The latter appears on the parapets of the Danish castle to convey a message, and Marx appeared before the fortresses of Europe to proclaim the specter of communism. The messages and programs are similar. A crime is denounced; injustice must be done away with. A crime was committed by the bourgeoisie against the working peoples of the world and consequently revenge must be had—the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the installation of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

This is the essence. It is now easier to answer the question as to whether the roots of communism were guilty in themselves or merely the leaves of the plant when they began to discolor.

The age-old question as to whether we should believe a message brought by a ghost (any ghost that appears before us) can be answered clearly in the case of Marx. His analysis of capital—that is, his investigation of the crime—is precise and convincing. But this is where the problem begins.

The medieval ghost that appeared in the Danish castle to persuade Hamlet to take revenge (and at the same time to overthrow the usurper, etc., etc.) added one condition. It demanded that he exercise restraint in his vengeance.

The concept is not a new one. It derives neither from Shakespeare, nor from Saxo Grammaticus, upon whom the playwright relied for his material, nor from the Icelandic sagas, upon which Saxo Grammaticus relied. The concept is as old as the world itself. Show restraint! Do not go overboard in your vengeance. This maxim can be found in the oral literature, legends, customary law, and poetic chronicles of most of the peoples on earth. It is implicit in the Homeric epics, the ancient Greek tragedies, even in the roots of Greek civilization (the gods of Olympus punished the Greeks when they went too far in their vengeance against the Trojans). It is one of the most progressive concepts the human race has ever produced.

Is it possible that Karl Marx, who spent his whole life involved in the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and its replacement by the dictatorship of the proletariat, could have been unaware of this maxim? Should he not have suspected that this great upheaval—the most fundamental in the history of mankind—would be accompanied by rivers of blood, by devastation, horror, and vengeance as had never been seen before on this planet?

We can safely assume that Marx was aware of this, just as was any uneducated singer of epic songs or any grandmother rocking her grandchildren to sleep with fairy tales. It is by no means a nasty insinuation, but simply a logical conclusion that Marx knew this very well. But he preferred to shut his eyes and let the havoc be wreaked.

There are a couple of paragraphs somewhere in Marx’s work where he does deal with the “issue” (excessive violence), but they make things worse instead of better. They are incredibly naive, to say the least. It is easy to see that these paragraphs were added to wash his hands of the matter, in the manner of Pontius Pilate. Here he simply asks the working class to show some restraint in their exercise of vengeance. But the request is spurious. Marx suggested that the proletariat should not exert its rage on the dozen or so billionaires occupying key positions in the capitalist world, but should send them off to spend their remaining days as pensioners on a desert island.

It is difficult not to ask the question: “Mr. Marx, were you really so naive as not to know that when the capitalist world was overthrown, it was not simply a dozen or so billionaires who fell victim to wrath and vengeance, but millions of officials serving that social order: endless courtiers, bankers, judges, clergymen, merchants, policemen, civil servants, farmers, artists, soldiers, pimps, and scoundrels?” This is exactly what happened in all the Communist countries where tens of millions of people were snuffed out by the vehement hurricane of class struggle.

Karl Marx should not have devoted simply a couple of obscure and rarely read paragraphs—but the core of his work—to what the Danish
ghost demanded. What he ought to have written was a “Second Manifesto” to begin as follows: “A specter of retaliation is haunting Europe, that of the victory of communism, the specter of unbridled revenge.”

With this second proclamation, Karl Marx would not have held back all the crimes to come, but he could at least have saved some of the people from the fury of blind revenge.

The history of the Other would then have been quite different.

Translated by Robert Elsie and Janice Mathie-Heck
Lesson #2 - Ismail Kadare, “History of the Other”
What Is America?

Estimated time: 3, 50-minute class periods; grades 9-12.

Context
The United States of America:
◦ provides citizens with tremendous, unprecedented freedoms
◦ is at the center of global business and technology innovation
◦ controls the largest economy in the world
◦ is the entertainment capital of the world
◦ has the strongest higher education system in the world
◦ is the only nation to have fought a Civil War over slavery
◦ is the only nation to have ever used nuclear weapons against another nation
◦ has the smallest proportion of Native peoples in the Americas (except possibly Uruguay)
◦ spends about as much for military expenses as all other nations combined
◦ ranks 139th out of 172 nations in the proportion of its voting-age population who actually vote

What Is America?

In “History of the Other,” Kadare lays out evidence to support his claim that “…the Other likely goes way back … just as old as human sexuality, fear, and death … [and] it probably began one day when a caveman returned horror-struck to his companions, reporting that he had seen something awful, something amazing, something that left him speechless. Based on your reading of “History of the Other”, your other studies, and/or any prior knowledge, respond to the question: What is America? Think about people, ideas, events, trends, narratives, changes. Produce your response in one of the following formats:
◦ audio recording – podcast or song l rap
◦ advertising campaign – ads for products across history
◦ creative non-fiction l historical fiction – blog or diary
◦ video – documentary
◦ spoken words – speech, monologue, dialogue, interview

Remember that what you produce will be an ARGUMENT of what you believe America is based on your ANALYSIS of “History of the Other” as well any current events, US history, and/or American literature. Your final project will be evaluated based on the analytical strength (two axes | intersectionality), creativity, the depth of your evidence, and depth of explanations.

Step 1: based on what you know, brainstorm ideas about what America might be in your opinion
Step 2: watch Sociology – Alexis de Tocqueville - what did de Tocqueville get right? get wrong? This is a model to help you think about what one person would respond to the question, What is America?
Step 3: plan, develop, and build out your project
Step 4: get feedback from peers, family, etc. + work toward completion

Additional Required Elements (graded as homework)
◦ a list of 10 ideas that you believe are important to “knowing” America but that you had to cut from your project for some reason
◦ a one-sentence answer to: what is the most important moment in U.S. history?
◦ a one-sentence answer to: what is the most important literary narrative in U.S. history?
Assessing and argument based on analysis…

Analytical Strength

Depth of evidence

Creativity

Depth of explanation(s)
Also by Ismail Kadare

Broken April
The Palace of Dreams
The Concert
The Pyramid
The File on H
The Three-Arched Bridge
The General of the Dead Army
Spring Flowers, Spring Frost
The Successor
Chronicle in Stone
Agamemnon's Daughter
The Siege

Ismail Kadare

Three Elegies for Kosovo

Translated from the Albanian by Peter Constantine

Vintage Books
London
THE ROYAL PRAYER
As the army prepared to set out on its homeward march with my body, leaving behind only my blood gathered in a leaden vessel, I felt for a while that the world had fallen silent forever. But then I heard therumbling of the iron chariots and the trampling of hooves growing fainter in the distance, and I realized that I had been left here on my own.

I had heard my father say, as he had heard his father say, that all aberration, memory, fury, and vengeance are imprinted in a man's blood. And yet it seems that I was the first monarch whose blood was so violently pressed out of his body on these cursed plains. My corpse—limbs, crowned head, hair, my grey chest with the wound in its centre—was carried to Anatolia, taking nothing with it. Everything remained here, and I have come to believe that my viziers had done this to elude the shadow of my blood.

Thus they left, abandoning me here in this tomb, with
an oil lamp above me burning day and night. I thought they would be quick to return, to attack Europe, now that the road lay open, or at least to pay homage to me, to show that they had not forgotten me. But spring came and went, as did summer, and then another spring, but no one came.

Where were they, what were they doing? Three years passed, seven, thirteen. Here and there a lone traveller stopping at my tomb brought me smatterings of news from the world. I wanted to shout – “Serves you right, Bayezid my son!” – when I heard that Tamerlane had battled his way into Ankara and locked him in an iron cage like a savage beast.

So this was the reason why they had stayed away so long. My curse had struck my son who had killed his brother, Yakub, and perhaps even me, to seize my throne.

When there is no hope, time passes so much more slowly than when hope exists. Blood does not lose its power as it congeals. Even dry, powdered over the sides of the leaden vessel, it grows only wilder.

A curse upon you, people of the Balkans, who charged me to set out in my old age and lay down my life on these plains! Above all, a curse upon you for my solitude!

The twentieth year passed, and still there was no news. The twenty-fifth year. The fortieth. I had begun to believe that all had been lost forever, when I heard a familiar rumbling clatter. When peoples are preparing for battle against each other there is no mistaking the signs. “Here they come!” I said. “Here come my Turks!” New commanders will have arisen, new viziers and, needless to say, a new generation of men. I was ready to offer my death to my people, to give them my blessing, when I realized that these were not Turks approaching.

The Balkan peoples were out to slaughter each other on the Plains of Kosovo. This time Serbs and Albanians had hoisted their emblems: the Albanians the Catholic cross, the Serbs the Orthodox.

“Butcher each other, you Balkan savages!” I muttered, renewing my curse on them.

But even without my curse they were determined to trample one another into the ground. They had set out on this course of destruction six hundred, seven hundred years before my campaign. They had reached a temporary truce in these flatlands, only to resume their terrible slaughter even more viciously than before.

I must say I felt great joy at hearing them taunt each other. But soon enough my joy began to fade. Their fury was so protracted that even I, an outsider, grew weary.

Many years passed this way. Seventy, then a hundred and seventy. The oil lamp with its dim flame burned and burned in my tomb. New Sultans with ancient, ever-recurring names appeared – Mehmet, Murad, Sulejman, Ahmet, Murad, Mehmet – only to fall, one after the
other, into oblivion. They had managed to bring half of Europe to its knees, but now, weary, they began to fall back. The Christian Cross turned out to be more powerful than it had seemed. Our Crescent withdrew from Vienna, the Hungarian flatlands, semblre Poland, Ukraine, Crimea, and finally the Balkan lands, which I believe we had loved the most. Perhaps we picked up the Balkan people's madness and they picked up our sluggishness. In the end we parted forever, each to our own destiny.

I remained more solitary than ever, with the pale flame of the oil lamp above me, a sorrowful crown.

And the Balkans, instead of trying to build something together, attacked each other again like beasts freed from their iron chains. Their songs were as wild as their weapons. And the prophecies and proclamations were terrible. "For seven hundred years I shall burn your towers! You dogs! For seven hundred years I shall cut you down!" the minstrels sang. And what they declared in their songs was inevitably done, and what was done was then added to their songs, as poison is added to poison.

Time has flown. Five hundred years passed since the day I fell. Then five hundred and seventy. Then six hundred. I am still here, alone in my tomb with the flame of the charred oil lamp, while their din, like the roar of the sea, never ends.

From time to time the wind brings shreds of tattered newspaper, thrown away by travellers. From these I learn what is going on all around. The surprising names of viziers and countries: NATO. R. Cook. Madeleine Albright. The slaughter of children in Drnič. Milosević. Mein Kampf. Again the name of the woman vizier. At times, my name too appears amongst theirs: Murad I.

Allah, I have been so tired for over six hundred years now, a Moslem monarch all alone in the middle of the vast Christian expanses. During my worst hours I am seized by the suspicion that maybe my blood is the origin of all this horror. I know this is a crazed suspicion, and yet, in this non-existence in which I am, I beg you: Finally grant me oblivion, My Lord! Make them remove my blood from these cold plains. And not just the leaden vessel, but make them dig up the earth around where my tent stood, where drops of my blood splattered the ground. O Lord, hear my prayer! Take away all the mud around here, for even a few drops of blood are enough to hold all the memory of the world.

March 1997–March 1998
Lesson #3 - Ismail Kadare, *Three Elegies for Kosovo*: “The Royal Prayer”

**Process/How-to Essay**

Estimated time: 2-3, 50-minute class periods; grades 9-12.

**Writing about a Process (The How-to Essay):**

Write a brief paper (1-3’ish pages) in which you reveal a process that tells your audience how to do – or how not to do – something that you consider important and worthwhile—or frivolous and fun.

In this essay, you have permission to have some fun, telling your reader how to survive the family road trip with the strange cousins, how not to embarrass yourself during middle school (is that possible?), how to suck up to teachers successfully. Or, you can be more serious and personal and describe the process of dealing with difficulties like loss, grief, a mental or physical illness, etc. The key here is that you do NOT merely give directions to a mechanical process (like buying ski boots or sharpening knives).

Kadare’s essay “The Royal Prayer” is a type of how-to essay in which a deceased sultan, Murad I, a “Muslim monarch all alone in the middle of the vast Christian expanses”, is writing a prayer to Allah, giving instructions on why and how not to pass on the curse that his father gave him and that he gave his sons, Bayezid and Yakub. Murad I is known for military victories as well as gaining new land and establishing systems of power in the Ottoman Empire. Yet Kadare, using fiction and maybe even some magical realism, has the Sultan asking for oblivion (like other sultans) as opposed to the eternal loneliness felt in his tomb. Kadare’s fiction is about the asking and maybe even begging for his blood to be taken away so that it may not curse anyone else. The essay is a dramatic version of a how-to essay in which a deceased monarch grapples with the reality that “When there is no hope, time passes so much more slowly than when hope exists. Blood does not lose its power as it congeals.”

In writing this piece, you will need to keep in mind the following:

- **Your purpose for writing**: what do you hope to accomplish with this piece? Do you want to instruct, to explain how something is done, to criticize or condemn, to help the reader accomplish a task, to satisfy the reader’s curiosity, to amuse or entertain, to tell a story, or . . . ? Determine your purpose before you begin writing, and then, while writing, make sure that your content, style, and tone suit your purpose effectively. Be consistent.

- **Organization**: have you organized your ideas effectively? Is the chronology of your piece easy to follow? Have you used transitions to help your writing flow smoothly and to make clear your movement from one idea or step to another?

- **Topic**: have you chosen a topic that is interesting? Have you avoided a technical or mechanical process and focused instead on some kind of process important, amusing, or compelling to you and your reader?

- **Content**: have you included salient detail and vivid imagery to make your piece interesting to read? Have you included all steps in your process? Do you have a strong lead and even stronger ending?
• **Voice**: if you are writing a humorous piece, have you taken on the persona of someone else—usually someone a bit clueless? Have you gotten loud enough and used enough exaggeration? If you are writing a more serious piece, does your voice coincide with the seriousness of your topic?

Your assignment will be assessed on including the above elements as well as some sort of overarching theme, strong paragraph structure, proofreading and polish, AND your willingness to take creative or intellectual risks. I will grade these essays based on the following 6-trait rubric.
6-Traits How-To Essay Rubric

1. IDEA DEVELOPMENT (25 pts.) __________
   - the essay focuses on a process that is interesting, important, or amusing to both the writer and audience
   - the essay selectively and purposefully uses quality detail and explanation to make the essay compelling to read
   - thoughts are clearly expressed and directly relevant to a thesis, whether implied or stated
   - the essay shows a depth of thought that engages the reader; the writer has taken creative risks to reveal something thoughtful and wonderful about him/herself

2. ORGANIZATION (15 pts.) __________
   - the order, presentation, or internal structure of the essay moves the reader purposefully through the text
   - paragraphs show cohesion, and details fit logically and effectively where they are placed
   - ideas are linked together naturally through effective use of transitions
   - a strong lead captures the reader’s interest
   - a satisfying conclusion derives clearly and logically from the detail and description, ending the essay strongly

3. WORD CHOICE (15 pts.) __________
   - language is precise, vivid, and natural: not trite or overblown
   - the writer’s message is remarkably clear and easy to interpret
   - phrasing is original and memorable, and verbs are strong and effective

4. SENTENCE FLUENCY (15 pts.) __________
   - sentences have a flow cadence, and clarity, which make the essay sound natural and fluid when read aloud; transitions help make the writing flow smoothly
   - sentences vary in both structure and length, making them flow naturally, to avoid choppiness and monotony
   - phrasing is clear and concise
   - verb tense is consistent throughout

5. VOICE (20 pts.) __________
   - the writer’s energy and/or sincerity for the subject drive the essay, making it engaging
   - if the topic is serious, the language is natural and down-to-earth and sounds like the writer would speak: the reader can actually hear the author’s voice when reading his or her essay
   - if the topic is humorous, the voice is exaggerated, perhaps that of a different persona.

6. CONVENTIONS (10 pts.) __________
   - the writer shows excellent control over a wide range of standard writing conventions and uses them with accuracy and style to enhance meaning
   - the essay appears clean, edited, and polished
   - errors are non-existent or so few that they do not distract or confuse the reader
   - 2 points off per spelling error; 1 point off for each major grammatical/punctuation error

TOTAL (100) __________
STORMY WEATHER ON MOUNT OLYMPUS
Tragedy of Prometheus and a Group of Divinities
in Fourteen Tableaux
by Ismail Kadare

Dramatis personae

The Dream Courier, divine messenger
Erebus
Hypnos, god of sleep
Hermes, celestial liaison officer

Also, gods, goddesses, bigwigs, a woman, a man who is both her husband and her brother, a fop, common people, a philosopher, an actor, a Mount Olympus road-sweeper, a bard, a painter, tourists, passers-by, paparazzi.

The events take place on three levels: Heaven, Earth, and the Underworld. The time of action is universal or relative, oriented or non-oriented, and operates at different speeds in Heaven, on Earth, and in the Underworld.

FIRST TABLEAU

HEAVEN

Mount Olympus. An afternoon in September. Light rain. From time to time, distant lightning. Hypnos. The Dream Courier. Hermes, holding a vase shaped like a tin can labeled “NECTAR.” They are having a conversation a few steps away from a celestial public building. A car stops in front of the entrance. Someone gets out.

[about half way in to the “First Tableau - Heaven”]

EREBUS: [To Hypnos and The Dream Courier] Do you know that people below, on Earth, have begun using the same kind of expression? Guess how they’ve adapted it: “Act a bit more humanely…”

THE DREAM COURIER: What did you say? More humanely? That must be a joke! (Hypnos returns) So, what have you heard?

HYPNOS: The rumor has spread all over Heaven: Zeus and Prometheus…

THE DREAM COURIER: What’s that?

HYPNOS (panting): Zeus and Prometheus had a terrible fight. Everyone on Mount Olympus is talking about it.

EREBUS: In Heaven’s name, what’s the cause of their quarrel?
HYPNOS: Well, it takes your breath away. Guess what? They’re fighting over an issue with humans!

EREBUS: Tut, tut. That’s the last thing I could have imagined—that the Boss would be in a fuss over those despicable gnats. Let alone they could be the reason for a plenary meeting of the gods. There must be some other reason that hasn’t been made public. It’s not the first time we’ve seen something like that: a rumor is put about that a meeting has been called to deal with a drought, meaning to sort out agricultural issues, and then it turns out that the real agenda is to unmask a plot.

THE DREAM COURIER: What are you driving at, Erebus?

An unaccustomed noise attracts the attention of all: the grinding sound of a power saw with intermittent thuds of a sledgehammer and the whirr of propellers that start and then suddenly stop.

EREBUS: That awful racket again! Seems they really are trying to repair Zeus’ eagle, as I’d heard people say. But as for your wide-eyed look when I said there might be a plot… How could I not think of it, sister? Come away, we’ll talk about it… A dispute about humans? It’s as if you and I were bickering about ants running on the ground and carrying twigs to the hole where they live… For humans remind us more of ants than any other critters. No, this dispute must have some deeper roots.

HYPNOS (quietly, as to not be heard by Hermes): Do you think it’s about rivals, about a struggle for power?

EREBUS: Why not? It wouldn’t be the first time.

HYPNOS: That’s what I thought too, initially. Then I persuaded myself that this dissension was truly about the humans. (Still quietly) I hear that Prometheus may have stolen the fire of the gods and gifted it to humans.

EREBUS: No, that’s just not possible!

HYPNOS: It’s as true as the fact that you and I are chatting together on Mount Olympus and that it’s raining outside!

EREBUS: Ever since he was appointed celestial officer responsible for the surveillance and protection of human rights, it’s obvious that he got too big for his britches. But I’d never have imagined that he’d lose his mind to that extent…
HYPNOS: But that’s Prometheus all over. Lots of ability, no doubt about it. He presents well, he’s elegant and dignified, but unfortunately he’s too proud and ambitious. Ever since he started looking after humans, his flaws have got worse and worse.

THE DREAM COURIER: Over the past few years, his attitude toward women has changed as well. He’s become ever more distant and haughtier…

HYPNOS: The problem is that the Big Boss [Zeus], who’s permanently suspicious, could have taken Prometheus’ action as having a symbolic significance that may impact his own power.

EREBUS: Do you mean: his throne?

(A lightning strike in the distance.)

HYPNOS: Of course. That’s what the game is about. (A messenger enters and asks for Hermes. He whispers a few words in his ear. Then both walk away.) Ha! He finally took off! I can’t stand bootlickers or spies…

Curtain
“I’M WITH AND”
by BERNARD ROTH, Stanford Design School Professor

“I find that in real life, just as in this story, it is possible for everybody to be right in situations where it is assumed only one can be right.”

One of my favorite stories is about a courtroom hearing in which the plaintiff lays out his accusations and the judge replies “you are right!” The horrified defendant replies, wait a minute your honor, this is what really happened… When the defendant is finished the judge replies, “you are right!” At which point a bystander says, “wait a minute your honor; they can’t both be right.” The judge replies “you are right!”

I find that in real life, just as in this story, it is possible for everybody to be right in situations where it is assumed only one can be right. Often, if I am given two seemingly contradictory alternatives: such as technology is good, and technology is bad. I stand with AND, i.e., it is both good and bad. Recently, at a retreat, the d.school staff did an exercise where people were asked to show their preference between scenario A and scenario B, by moving from the center of the room to the side of the room which represented the one alternative they most agreed with. There were 6 different sets of choices, and I found myself almost completely alone in the center of the room for each choice. When a friend asked where I stood, I replied, “I am with AND.”

Interestingly, about one month after we did this exercise, I asked the participants to tell me what the issues were that they voted on. Most people did not recall any of the issues, a few recalled one of the 6 issues. Everybody recalled that Bernie was with AND. Despite the impact my position made, I might be accused of being wishy-washy, being afraid to make a choice or take a side. Clearly a weak person surrounded by a world of strong-willed people who know where they stand on the big issues. Does being at AND denote weakness or fuzziness?

“AND speaks to one of the primary skills in design thinking and in life: being comfortable with ambiguity. AND opens one’s life to possibilities that do not exist if one is firmly entrenched on only one side of the room.”

In improv there is the maxim that “yes and” is the productive response to any offer, while “no but” is the destructive response. Just as being at AND works in improv, and it made a big impression on my d.school colleagues, it works in teaching and learning. AND speaks to one of the primary skills in design thinking and in life: being comfortable with ambiguity. AND opens one’s life to possibilities that do not exist if one is firmly entrenched on only one side of the room. It takes courage to move to the other side of the room, however once you’ve moved you are again stuck in a corner. With AND you are free to learn and grow in all directions. Education used to be largely stuck in the dogma of right or wrong. Now there is a lot more AND. This carries over to the rest of life. With AND, and the possibility of everybody being right, we’ve moved into a space where teams, families and individuals can be more nurtured in their interactions in school, at work and at home.
Lesson #4 - Inclement Weather on Mount Olympus
Prometheus + “I’m with And” and the Narratives Assignment

Estimated time: 2-3, 50-minute class periods; grades 11-12.

Sometimes called the Gettysburg address of the 20th century, on April 4, 1968, Robert F. Kennedy announced the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: “My favorite poet was Aeschylus. He once wrote, ‘Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.’” In this speech Kennedy ultimately asked his audience, again borrowing from the ancient Greeks, “to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world.”

In his play Inclement Weather on Mount Olympus, Ismail Kadare also uses the ancient writing of the Greeks to “contemplate the savageness of man.” Kadare reimagines Aeschylus’s lost trilogy, from which only Prometheus Bound has survived. This modern tragedy begins when Zeus calls a mysterious meeting of the gods on Mount Olympus to discuss Prometheus’s theft of fire and its consequences for the destiny of humanity. The play, which unfolds in the Heavens, on Earth, and in the Underworld, emphasizes the fluidity of time and space. Indeed, from the fall of antiquity to the collapse of communism, fundamental episodes of human history punctuate the gods’ attempt to deal with irrevocable change. Watch this Ted-Ed video that explains the Prometheus myth. Consider what motivated Prometheus to give fire to humans and what motivated Zeus to punish Prometheus?

In his essay "Aspects of Dictatorship", Kadare writes: “Under pressure, in those times usually christened as ‘dramatic,’ the writer is often asked to transform himself, to stop being a writer. And this is asked of him using slick phrases like ‘the times demand it.’ In short, in the name of morality, the writer is asked to do something immoral. In the name of life, death is called for. That happens because in dramatic times, many people do not want to hear anyone speak of literature.”

What narrative is Kadare embracing or forcing the audience to contemplate?

Assignment: Using writer David Brooks’s “6 American Narratives,” write an essay about which narrative you believe is the most dominant in America today. Incorporate Bernie Roth’s “I’m with And” thinking protocol in order to choose and write what you think is the most common narrative in the US. The purpose of this assignment is to help you build more meaningful insight into the United States of America through the stories – literary and historical – that are commonly told, commonly NOT told, and commonly told by a writer who was forced “to unravel himself like something bought and sold.” For this assignment, you need to contemplate: how do we construct how we know what we know about this country? Being aware of the historiographical contexts of a story and considering the many factors that determine perspective will help you produce more analytical work.
6 American Narratives according to David Brooks, NY Times

What does narrative mean?  a spoken or written account of connected events; a representation of a particular situation or process in such a way as to reflect or conform to an overarching set of aims or values.

1  the libertarian narrative that America is a land of free individuals responsible for their own fate. within the American consciousness, this narrative values the free market and freedom itself.

2  the narrative of globalized America. this is the narrative dominant in Silicon Valley and beyond.

3  the narrative of multicultural America. this narrative dominates America’s classrooms, from elementary school through university.

4  the narrative of America First. this narrative has resonated with voters who believe the country has lost its traditional identity

5  the narrative of mercantilism, which sees America not as the culmination of history but as a power in competition with rivals.

6  the narrative of America as a talented community, which sees the nation as history’s greatest lab for the cultivation of human abilities.

Strategies to help with this assignment:
•  Consider interviewing someone who is different than you across various identifiers of intersectionality in order to collect stories and opinions about America, past and present.
  •  In your interview, explain Bernard’s Roth “I’m with And” to see how it may or may not draw out multiple perspectives.
  •  You also need to recall for the interviewee the Prometheus myth, and pose the question: could it be said that the America of the Revolutionary era envisioned itself as the “Prometheus of nation-states”? Is the White House a modern-day Olympus and the President a modern-day Zeus?
•  It has been suggested that democracy is dying in some form today - do you believe this is true? Does your interviewee believer this to be true? (resource to consider: The Atlantic’s “Is Democracy Dying?”)
•  How might dominant narratives in America be changed so that the U.S. might become “a more perfect union” in the future? Michelle Alexander directly addresses this in her June 2020 op-ed.
Evaluation Rubric:

Assessing Thinking: The Five Continua
(Credit: Harvard Project Zero)

1. **OBVIOUS:**
   States the obvious, just scratches the surface, doesn’t stretch to go beyond the given information or surface story.

2. **BEYOND THE GIVEN:**
   Probes beneath the surface, reaches beyond the obvious, stretches for new applications, question, & connections.

3. **FUZZY:**
   Thinking moves aren’t clear (e.g. questions slide into statements, observations slide into interpretations, main argument/thesis not known). Rambling, unfocused, disorganized. Loses sight of main ideas or goals.

4. **CLEAR & FOCUSED:**
   Thinking moves are clearly differentiated, thinking has a clear structure. Goals, purposes are clear and appropriately met. Anchored to main ideas, conceptually well-organized.

5. **ELABORATED:**
   Rich in detail, evocative, imaginative, nuanced, descriptive. Ideas well-developed.

6. **SIMPLISTIC:**
   Under-described, no detail or nuance. Overly broad, overly simplified, overly generalized. Too many underdeveloped ideas.

7. **ONE-DIMENSIONAL:**
   Only touches on one layer or dimension of a topic, work of art, or idea. Doesn’t see complexity, layers, or other viewpoints.

8. **MULTI-DIMENSIONAL:**
   Touches on several layers or dimensions (e.g. facts; big ideas & themes; deep structure, puzzles, perspectives). Recognizes complexity, recognizes that there are different levels, layers, or perspectives.

9. **TANGENTIAL:**
   Doesn’t capture or recognize important themes, characteristics or elements. Strays from the topic. Hovers over unimportant details or ideas. Adjacent ideas not connected.

10. **ESSENCE-CAPTURING:**
    Insightful, captures the heart of things. Identifies key themes, characteristics or elements. Sees deep structure. Shows an appreciation for the relative importance of things. Ideas flow smoothly from one to another.
Lesson #5 - The Poetry of Ismail Kadare: “When My Memory” and “Train Timetables”
Estimated time: 2, 50-minute class periods; grades 9-12.

“Optima dies … prima fugit. (The best days are the first to flee.)”
- Virgil

As you read the following two poems by Ismail Kadare, think about what a memory is, and then be prepared to write your poem in which you record a memory. Be prepared to share it aloud and submit a final copy in writing.

And When My Memory, by Ismail Kadare

And when my fading memory,
Like the after-midnight trams,
Stops only at the main stations,
I will not forget you.

I will remember
That quiet evening, endless in your eyes,
The stifled sob upon my shoulder,
Like snow that cannot be brushed off.

The separation came
And I departed, far from you.
Nothing unusual,
But some night
Someone's fingers will weave themselves into your hair,
My distant fingers, stretching across the miles.


Train Timetables, by Ismail Kadare

I love those train timetables at little railway stations,
Standing on the wet platform and contemplating the infinity of the tracks.
The distant howl of a locomotive. What, what?
(No one understands the nebulous language of steam engines.)

Passenger trains. Tank cars. Freight cars full of ore
Endlessly pass by.
Thus pass the days of your life through the station of your being,
Filled with voices, noise, signals
And the heavy ore of memory.

Write an approximately 2- to 4-stanza poem - each stanza should be approximately 4 lines long, similar to Kadare’s poems - recording a memory of something important in your past. Be sure to show, not just tell, how this memory is/was particularly significant in the construction of who you are now. It is important to include significant details that show the specificity (precise account) of this event in your life as well as your reflection on that memory. This reflection should come from age, distance, and maturity, so for this reason you will be better off if you choose a memory more distant than recent.

For this poem, try to have all of the following items in your final draft:

1. A thesis/main focus [like the train timetable]. This need not be defined in one line or even be written explicitly in your poem, but you need to have a reason for writing about this memory. Hint: sometimes you don’t always realize the focus until after you’ve written the poem, or you may find that your thesis/focus changes as you write. Follow that instinct and just make sure that you have a focus, a reason for writing what you did.

2. At least one list.

3. Five really interesting verbs. Be careful not to go overboard with these. Sometimes the really interesting verbs may be some of the simplest, so choose the right verbs and not just the ones with the most syllables. Work on becoming aware of the verb to be, and try to avoid its overuse.

4. Only the necessary background information for this memory: where? when? what? (Remember, your reader wasn’t there with you, so you will need to set the scene so that your reader understands.)

5. At least one very specific sensory/images/details that appeal to all of the senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch

Triggers for a memory poem:
- remember a favorite possession that you had when you were young.
- remember a time you were denied a chance to do something because other people felt it was not right for your race, age, gender, etc.
- write about a time when you had to get yourself out of trouble.
- write about a time when you were disappointed by a parent – or anyone else close to you.
- recall a situation in which you experienced anxiety waiting for the results of something
- write a letter to a long-lost friend, OR a letter you meant to write but never did
- look through old photographs or family movies
- listen to a song that takes you back to a certain time or moment
- remember important childhood/adolescent moments:
  - rites of passage
  - holidays
  - worst or best school experiences
  - relatives
  - family rituals, traditions
  - vacations
  - favorite – or least favorite – gifts
  - great friends
  - firsts: crush, kiss, car, day of school, etc.
  - disappointing days
  - childhood fears
  - a time you made your parents or family proud
  - moments of loss, fear, joy, pride etc.
6 Trait Rubric: Writing to Record a Memory

1. IDEA DEVELOPMENT (20)
   -the poem is daring and clearly shows that the memory described has helped to define the writer
   -the poem selectively and purposefully uses quality detail, sensory imagery, and explanation to make the poem compelling to read
   -thoughts are clearly expressed and directly relevant to a well-defined thesis
   -the poem shows a depth of thought that engages the reader; the writer has taken creative risks to reveal something thoughtful and wonderful about him/herself

2. ORGANIZATION (15)
   -the order, presentation, or internal structure of the poem is compelling and moves the reader purposefully through the text
   -stanzas show cohesion, and details fit logically and effectively where they are placed
   -ideas are linked together naturally through effective use of transitions
   -a strong lead captures the reader’s interest
   -a satisfying conclusion derives clearly and logically from the detail and description, ending the poem strongly, reflectively

3. WORD CHOICE (20)
   -language is precise, vivid, and natural: not trite or overblown
   -the writer’s message is remarkably clear and easy to interpret
   -phrasing is original and memorable, and verbs are strong and effective

4. SENTENCE FLUENCY (15)
   -lines and phrases have a flow, cadence, and clarity, which make the poem sound natural and fluid when read aloud
   -lines and phrases vary in both structure and length, making them fluid and avoiding choppiness and monotony - unless intentional
   -phrasing is clear and concise
   -verb tense is consistent throughout

5. VOICE (20)
   -the writer’s energy and sincerity for the subject drive the poem, making it compelling and engaging
   -the language is natural and down-to-earth and sounds like the writer would speak: the reader can actually hear the author’s voice when reading his or her poem

6. CONVENTIONS (10)
   -the writer shows excellent control over a wide range of standard writing conventions and uses them with accuracy and style to enhance meaning
   -the poem appears clean, edited, and polished
   -errors are non-existent or so few that they do not distract or confuse the reader
   -2 points off per spelling error; 1 point off for each major grammatical/punctuation error

TOTAL (100)